

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

FIRST ICE PROVIDES FINAL CHANCE FOR WOOD DUCKS

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

With its piercing blood red eye and gaudy mix of iridescent blue, russet, sienna plumage, it's really no secret why the drake wood duck ranks as the world's most colorful waterfowl.

Whether on the wing or on the table, wood ducks also rank high on the hunters' list of favorites. Although an acorn fattened woodie can withstand plenty in the way of cold weather, they choose not to. By the time autumn treetops have turned bare and ice begins to edge the marshes, most flocks will have headed for warmer climes. By early November, the wood ducks all but gone.

This year's wood duck migration was already on the wane when Iowa received its first blast of blustery cold weather this past weekend. And as skies cleared and temperatures plummeted to well below freezing on Monday night, it marked the end of this year's "early season" duck hunting activities. Or did it?

Lamenting that thought, I determined to give the wood ducks one last try. As secretive as they are colorful, wood ducks frequent the most closed of waterfowl habitats. Secluded river backwaters, shallow willow sloughs, and cattail choked marshes are their

usual haunts. Although most of these popular loafing areas were sealed with a first time coating of ice Tuesday morning, I remembered an oak and acorn studded shoreline that is usually last to freeze. If any wood ducks were still around, there was a good possibility they would visit this place.

Overly anxious, my decoys were in place a full hour before sunrise. But as the morning sky finally began to color, wildlife began to stir. Woodland birds rustled in the leaves behind me while, in the water out front, a busy muskrat collected a bundle of winter food. Far off in the timber, a great horned owl sounded a final hoot.

By now the eastern sky was a solid blaze of orange. Like most waterfowl species, wood ducks are extremely early risers and it was time for things to be happening. In spite of this fact, the sky remained void of web-foots.

Considering the late date and fingers of ice now protruding from the shoreline, the lack of woodies was no surprise. It was no real tragedy either, I decided. The impending dawn had begun to reveal a spectacular autumn morning and I still had snacks and a thermos of coffee to work on. As I poured my first hot cup, a flash of movement suddenly caught my eye. Looking up, I spotted an incoming pair of woodies. The birds were already locked onto the decoys and there was no time, or need, to call.

Shouldering the shotgun, I swung to the lead bird. As I was about to fire, I saw the trailing duck pull even with the first. I squeezed the trigger and, amazingly, both birds fell stone dead as they collided with an ounce of steel sixes.

As my Labrador Ruby lunged for the water I realized that these would be the season's final wood ducks. As it turned out, both birds were hog fat, perfectly feathered drakes. Although they were the only woodies I saw this morning, the hunt marked a perfect conclusion to this season's fair weather waterfowling.

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IOWA FURBEARER SEASON BEGINS NOV. 1

Iowa's furbearer harvest season opens statewide on Nov. 1, and for the 12,000 dedicated furharvesters, the prospects for the 2008 season are good.

"Furbearer season offers good recreation in the outdoors and is a good season to introduce someone new into hunting or trapping. Raccoons are the primary, bread and butter species for furharvesters and they are in ample supply nearly everywhere," said Ron Andrews, furbearer biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Don Sievers, 59, from Jefferson, plans to be setting traps on opening day. Sievers was born into trapping and has been trapping most of his life. Growing up near Walnut, Sievers listened to his dad tell stories about trapping, hunting and fishing with his brothers. When he 8 years old, his father bought him and his brother a dozen traps and took them out on their own trapping line and he has been trapping every year since, except for a few years while in the service.

“I don’t get in to it for the prices of fur, although many people do and that’s okay, but I do it for the management aspect of it and for the experiences. I enjoy being out there early in the morning and getting to see the world wake up,” Sievers said.

Sievers had taken his son trapping and now enjoys taking anyone out who is willing to walk a trapping line. He has also loaned out traps to young trappers and offers tips and advice to help them along their way.

“It’s hard to compete with all the organized activities in kids lives,” Sievers said. “We need experienced furharvesters to bring some new young people into the sport. The outdoor experience will benefit them and, in turn, the sport in the long run.”

Many furbearers are considered a nuisance by landowners, for example, the impact raccoons can have on the sweet corn patch or chewing on old buildings, or coyotes for their potential impact on livestock.

“Generally furharvesters are welcome by most landowners, but there are some occasional concerns about the family dog or cat getting into traps,” Andrews said. “Generally those concerns can be put to rest by visiting with the landowner to get permission first and discussing where the hunting or trapping will be done.”

If using dogs to hunt raccoons, coyotes or fox, make sure to do some scouting and identify property boundaries as the pursuit of these species by hounds can occur over several property owners’ land.

This year marks the third year of a river otter harvest season in Iowa and the second year of a bobcat harvest season. The outlook for the river otter trapping-only season and the bobcat hunting and trapping season is also good. The bobcat harvest season has a quota of 200 and is open in the lower two tiers of counties and in Pottawattamie, Harrison, Monona and Woodbury counties in western Iowa. River otter harvest season quota is 500 otters and is open statewide. There is a season bag limit is two river otters and one bobcat per licensed furharvester.

Once a bobcat or otter is harvested, the furharvester must call a conservation officer or other DNR staff within 24 hours to receive a CITES tag before skinning the animal. The tag stands for Convention in Trade of Endangered Species and is a federal requirement. The tag is attached to the pelt of the animal and is proof that the bobcat was harvested legally and is not the look-alike pelt of the endangered Mexican bobcat subspecies, and that the river otter pelt is not the look-alike endangered sea otter pelt.

“We are collecting important data on these two species from carcass collection of bobcats and otters, that we will use as we continue to evaluate the seasons and to monitor population trends,” Andrews said. “The carcass collection and subsequent biological data is critical to the continuation of these seasons and our furharvesters must continue to cooperate by helping us collect carcasses of both of these species.”

Once the quotas are reached, there is a 48 hour grace period allowing the harvest of both of these species as long as furharvesters have not attained their season bag limit. The DNR requires furharvesters to carefully release all live bobcats or river otters taken after the grace period closes. All dead bobcats and river otters caught in traps after the 48 hour grace period closes must be turned over to the conservation officer. If the bobcat or river otter is dead, the furharvester can turn in bobcats or otters with out penalty. The DNR will update its website (iowadnr.gov) and harvest hotline (515-281 5918) stating the quota is reached and issue media releases alerting furharvesters of the closing season of these two species.

The current world economy makes the fur market unpredictable, however it does appear that pelt prices could be similar to last year. Andrews encourages furharvesters to pursue their quarry for the great outdoor experiences and recreational value rather than pelt prices alone.

For questions regarding fur seasons contact Andrews via cell phone at 641-425-5088.

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USE CAUTION ON IOWA’S ROADWAYS – DEER ARE ON THE MOVE

A deer-vehicle collision can happen at any time in Iowa and it is important for motorists to remain alert for deer, livestock, other wildlife, and obstacles that can pose a hazard while driving. With fall well under way, it is a time for drivers to exercise even more caution as many deer-vehicle collisions occur in the fall months during the white-tailed deer’s breeding season or “rut.”

By the latter part of October, bucks become more active with the approaching rut, increasing their activity and travels in search of does ready to breed. The animal’s attention is on other things and their vigilance when crossing a road is decreased. In addition to this the bucks are often crossing roads in areas they are not familiar with or in places they would usually not cross.

As the rut progresses, and does begin to come into breeding condition, it is normal for them to be chased for a period of time by one or more bucks. This creates a situation

with multiple, fast-moving, deer crossing highways that are often oblivious to traffic. Typically, the month of November has the highest occurrence of deer-vehicle collisions.

In order to help avoid collisions with deer during late October and November, drivers should use extra care while driving. Deer may be moving at any time of the day or night and crossing roads at unexpected places. Drivers should be constantly scanning the roadside ditches for deer approaching the highway and understand that their actions will be more unpredictable than usual. If the driver can spot the deer before it enters the roadway their chances for avoiding a collision are greatly increased.

When driving at night, it is recommended that drivers do not use cruise control as the vehicle remains under full power until the brake or clutch pedal is depressed and this can mean the difference between avoiding a collision and having one. Driving slower at night also provides an extra margin of safety. If you have another vehicle in front of you, utilize their headlights to help you scan the roadsides that are beyond the reach of the lights on your vehicle.

Traveling at prudent speeds at night cannot be overemphasized as it is easy to overdrive your headlights and there are many other highway obstacles besides deer. The average stopping distance for a vehicle traveling 60 mph is about 300 feet including reaction time. The illumination distance of high beam headlights is about the same distance. However, most drivers do not concentrate on the roadway 300 feet ahead of their vehicle, especially at night and objects smaller than another vehicle are easily overlooked at these distances. Low beam headlights are not made for speeds of more than 40 mph. When driving in areas where forested or brushy habitats are adjacent to highways and where these habitats intersect highways in depressions or ridgelines, one should remain alert for deer approaching the roadway. At dawn, dusk, and at night it is prudent not to drive faster than 50-55 mph in these specific areas at the very least. If a deer is sighted, switching headlights to low beam can often “unfreeze” a deer and encourage it to move off the roadway. Avoid passing in posted deer crossing areas if possible.

Although the risk of hitting a deer increases in the fall, this risk can be minimized by remaining alert and driving defensively. Of course, there are situations where a collision cannot be avoided and it is important to remember that it is usually safer to hit the animal than to leave the roadway or to swerve into oncoming traffic.

The number of road-killed deer reported by the Department of Transportation along with officer reports of salvaged road-kills was down by 8 percent in 2007 from the previous year. Statewide deer populations are declining. Regionally, portions of central and west central Iowa (about 15 counties) still need greater deer harvests to put those populations into a decline. The Iowa DNR has population goals and hunting seasons over much of Iowa that are intended to significantly lower current deer densities. Achievement of these goals should result in a lower rate of deer-vehicle collisions for Iowa as a whole. However, even when the population goals are achieved, there will still be pockets throughout the state with higher densities of deer where deer hunting is not allowed or where the antlerless harvest on certain properties is deficient.

For more information, contact Tom Litchfield, state deer biologist at (641) 774-2958.

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GET AWAY THIS FALL TO IOWA'S NEW OUTDOOR DESTINATION - HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK

MORAVIA, Iowa - At Honey Creek Resort your family can experience a rush on a water slide, or enjoy a crisp fall evening on the shores of one of Iowa's most scenic lakes.

Just a 90-minute drive south of Des Moines, this new, year-round destination will ensure visitors a great getaway.

Nestled on the shores of Rathbun Lake in Appanoose County, Honey Creek Resort accommodations offer stunning views of the lake, with two suites featuring cozy fireplaces, transforming a typical hotel stay into a delightful, peaceful retreat.

Guests can meander through wilderness trails surrounding the resort, or relax in overstuffed arts-and-crafts chairs in the sunny great lodge, which is graced with a massive mosaic fireplace.

The resort's Rathbun Lakeshore Grille serves up classic American fare and has picturesque views of the lake; a warm fire is always burning. Starters include walleye fingers and baked mozzarella bruschetta, while main dishes range from applewood smoked turkey sandwiches to gooseberry broiled salmon.

Guests looking to experience excitement as the weather turns colder can head to the Buccaneer Bay Indoor Water Park. Float on the relaxing lazy river, slip down the body slide, dance under a watery geyser or stand guard on the interactive pirate ship. If you get hungry, guests can grab a treat from the snack bar and play all the latest video games in the arcade.

If golf is your game, there's still time this season to enjoy the 18-hole championship Preserve golf course designed for the novice and experienced golfer. It is nestled in the prairie just north of the main lodge with bent grass tees, greens and fairways. The course has a full driving range, putting green and Club Car golf carts equipped with GPS.

The natural setting is sure to inspire both business and leisure guests alike, with a restful lake resort that boasts beautiful amenities and accommodations, in a natural setting.

Thoughtful staff will help guests connect with DNR naturalists, letting them experience everything from stargazing on an evening hike to lingering over a bonfire. An abundance of outdoor activities await year-round at the new outdoor destination, so prepare to enjoy every moment at Honey Creek Resort State Park.

For more information visit www.honeycreekresort.com or call 877-677-3344.

Contacts: Lee Fundanet, Director of Operations, Central Group Management, LLC and Management Company for Honey Creek Resort State Park, (320) 469-6468, LFundanet@centralgroupcompanies.com

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APPLICATION PERIOD OPEN FOR SPRINGBROOK STATE PARK SPECIAL DEER HUNT

GUTHRIE CENTER- The application period for the Springbrook State Park Special Antlerless-only deer hunts has been set for Nov. 1 – 14 (archery) and Nov. 15 – 28 (firearms).

The park management hunts will be held on Nov. 27 – Dec. 21 (archery season) and Dec. 13 and 14, 2008 (firearms season). Applications are available through the park office. All applications must include a check for \$27 to cover the cost of the deer license. Hunters will also be required to possess a small game hunting license and pay the habitat fee, if normally required to have them to hunt.

Registration is limited to 30 permits for the archery hunt and 75 permits for the firearms hunt. A second license may be requested at the reduced fee of \$12, if additional permits are available.

The hunt is a population control hunt and will be limited to the harvest of only antlerless deer. All hunting will take place on park property. The park will be open to the public during the archery season but will be closed to the public during the firearms season.

Springbrook State Park is in Guthrie County, approximately eight miles north of Guthrie Center.

For more information, or to request an application, contact the park office at (641)747-3591.

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CITIES FUND NEW PROJECTS WITH REAP

About \$4.3 million have been awarded to 28 Iowa communities and 6 county conservation boards through grants from the state's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program.

In its 20th year, REAP reached its second highest year of funding with an \$18 million appropriation in the last legislative session, drawing from state gaming revenues. Sales of natural resource license plates and interest on the account add another \$1 million.

One hundred and two applicants in the competitive grant program for cities and county conservation boards had asked for \$12.35 million, almost three times the amount available. Grants awarded include

Small cities, population less than 2,000:

Slater, \$75,000, Grand Central Station trailhead

Dallas Center, \$22,510, Raccoon River Valley Trail addition

For more information contact Ross Harrison, ross.harrison@dnr.iowa.gov, 515-281-5973

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